NAXOS

DDD

8.550451

BARTÓK

Mikrokosmos (Selection)

15 Hungarian Peasant Songs
6 Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm

Balázs Szokolay, Piano

Béla Bartók (1881 - 1945)

The Hungarian composer Béla Bartók was born in 1881 in an area that now forms part of Romania. His father, director of an agricultural college, was a keen amateur musician, while it was from his mother that he received his early piano lessons. The death of his father in 1889 led to a less settled existence, when his mother resumed work as a teacher, eventually settling in the Slovak capital of Bratislava (the Hungarian Pozsony), where Bartók passed his early adolescence, counting among his school-fellows the composer Ernö Dohnányi. Offered the chance of musical training in Vienna, like Dohnányi he chose instead Budapest, where he won a considerable reputation as a pianist, being appointed to the teaching staff of the Academy of Music in 1907. At the same time he developed a deep interest, shared with his compatriot Zoltán Kodály, in the folk-music of his own and of adjacent countries, later extended as far as Anatolia, where he collaborated in research with the Turkish composer Adnan Saygün.

As a composer Bartók found acceptance much more difficult, particularly in his own country, which was, in any case, beset by political troubles, when the brief post-war left-wing government of Béla Kun was replaced by the reactionary régime of Admiral Horthy. Meanwhile his reputation abroad grew, particularly among those with an interest in contemporary music, and his success both as a pianist and as a composer, coupled with dissatisfaction at the growing association between the Horthy government and National Socialist Germany, led him in 1940 to emigrate to the United States of America.

In his last years, after briefly holding teaching appointments at Columbia and Harvard, Bartók suffered from increasing ill-health, and from poverty which the conditions of exile in war-time could do nothing to alleviate. He died in straitened circumstances in 1945, leaving a new Viola Concerto incomplete and a third Piano Concerto more nearly finished.

The Allegro barbaro of 1911, published in 1918, its very title a provocation, is a work of savage energy, firmly rooted in Magyar folk-dance. It marked a

departure for Bartók from a style that showed the more overt influence of Debussy and, in Hungarian terms, of Liszt. Four years earlier he had arranged the Three Hungarian Folksongs from the Csík District, collected in Transylvania and making use of melodies he had heard played on the shepherd's pipe, the tilinkó. The Fifteen Hungarian Peasant Songs were arranged between 1914 and 1918 and were published in 1920. The work is made up of four groups, the first consisting of four old tunes, the fifth piece a Scherzo and the sixth a Ballad, in the form of a theme of asymmetrical rhythm and variations. The work is completed with a group of nine old dance-tunes.

Bartók wrote his Sonatina in 1915 and it was published in Hungary in 1919. The work makes use of folk-tunes, presented, in general, in their most straightforward form. The Bagpipers of the first movement, with its irregularities of rhythm and suggestion of a drone bass, is followed by a short and heavily rhythmical Bear Dance. The Sonatina ends with a finale of increasing excitement. The work was later transcribed for orchestra under the title Transylvanian Dances, a description of its musical origin. The Three Rondos on Slovak Folk-tunes include one written in 1916, to which two more were added in 1927. Once again the original material of the first rondo is presented more or less as transcribed, while the later two rondos make much freer use of the original material. The composer admitted to a pupil some difficulty in composing the second rondo, in which he had wanted to include a third theme, but this proved impracticable.

Mikrokosmos is a remarkable collection of pieces, forming a coherent introduction to the kind of piano technique necessary for performance of contemporary music, starting from the simplest beginning and leading to the concert pieces of the sixth and final volume. The first two books, written in 1926, were dedicated to Bartók's second son, Péter. By 1937 the collection, still unpublished, included 153 pieces, some of which the composer was including in his own recitals, as he did in the last concert he gave in Hungary in October 1940 and the first he gave in the United States after his emigration.

The first book of Mikrokosmos includes 36 short pieces, without thumb-crossing, and this elementary technique is continued in the thirty pieces of the second book, which opens with a short piece in the Lydian mode. No. 40 is described as in Yugoslav mode, and No. 50 as a Minuet. The third volume contains a further thirty pieces. No. 73 is an exercise in sixths and triads, No. 82 a Scherzo and No. 87 Variations. The 25 pieces of the fourth book, which now involves thumb-crossing, include No. 100, in the style of a folksong, Nos. 113 and 115, examples of asymmetrical Bulgarian rhythm, No. 116 a Hungarian melody and No. 120 a melody in the mixolydian mode. In the fifth volume there are eighteen pieces, of greater length and complexity. The first piece, No. 122, is a chordal study and No. 126 an exercise in changes of time. No. 128, a Peasant Dance, is followed by the alternating thirds of No. 129 and the varied touch called for in the Lydian mode Village Joke, No. 130. Varied touch is demanded again in the fourths of No. 131, while No. 133 offers syncopation and No. 135 the rapidity of a Perpetuum Mobile.

The sixth volume of Mikrokosmos contains only thirteen pieces, starting with the free variations of No. 140, involving considerable complexity of rhythm. No. 144 is a study in the most discordant intervals, the minor second and major seventh. No. 146 an Ostinato, with a repeated bass pattern of Oriental suggestion, is followed by a March, No. 147, of primitive character. The book ends with Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm, testimony to Bartók's command of thematic material of popular origin, set off by his own idiomatic harmonic and textural treatment, which gives the traditional melodies a new energy.

Balázs Szokolay

The Hungarian pianist Balázs Szokolay was born in Budapest in 1961, the son of a mother who is a pianist and a father who is a composer and professor at the Ferenc Liszt Academy. He started learning the piano when he was five and in 1970 entered the preparatory class of the Budapest Music Academy, where he completed his studies with Pal Kadosa and Zoltán Kocsis in 1983. He later spent two years at the Academy of Music in Munich, with a German government scholarship.

Balázs Szokolay made an early international appearance with Péter Nagy at the Salzburg Interforum in 1979, and in 1983 substituted for Nikita Magaloff in Belgrade in a performance of the Piano Concerto No. 1 of Brahms. He is now a soloist with the Hungarian State Orchestra and has given concerts in a number of countries abroad, including Austria, Switzerland, France, Italy, Poland, the former Soviet Union, Bulgaria and Czecho-Slovakia. In September, 1987, he made his recital début at the Royal Festival Hall in London. He has won a number of important prizes at home and abroad, including, most recently, success in the 1987 Queen Elisabeth of the Belgians Competition. He took fourth place in the Leeds International Piano Competition in 1990, when his playing was particularly commended in the British press for its energy and imagination.

1. Allegro barbaro: Tempo giusto (2:25)

Three Hungarian Folksongs from the Csík District

2. Rubato (1:23)
3. L'istesso tempo (1:07)
4. Poco vivo (0:41)

Fifteen Hungarian Peasant Songs

Four Old Tunes

5. Rubato (0:44)
6. Andante (1:41)
7. Poco rubato (0:32)
8. Andante (0:27)
9. Scherzo: Allegro (0:44)
10. Ballade: Tema con variazioni: Andante (2:40)

Old Dance Tunes

11. Allegro (0:38)
12. Allegretto (0:25)
13. Allegretto (0:13)
14. L'istesso tempo (0:26)
15. Assai moderato (0:43)
16. Allegretto (0:27)
17. Poco più vivo - Allegretto (0:28)
18. Allegro (0:28)
19. Allegro (1:23)

Sonatina

20.	Bagpipers: Molto moderato	(1:31)
21.	Bear Dance: Moderato	(0:40)
22.	Finale: Allegro vivace	(1:36)

Three Rondos on Slovak Folktunes

23.	Andante (1916)	(2:44)
24.	Vivacissimo (1927)	(2:22)
25.	Allegro molto (1927)	(2:32)

Mikrokosmos (Excerpts)

26.	Vol. 2 No. 37 In Lydian mode (Allegretto)	(0:36)
27.	Vol. 4 No. 100 In the Style of a folk song (Andante)	(0:46)
28.	Vol. 4 No. 113 Bulgarian rhythm (Allegro molto)	(0:57)
29.	Vol. 3 No. 82 Scherzo (Allegretto scherzando)	(0:27)
30.	Vol. 4 No. 115 Bulgarian rhythm (Vivace)	(0:26)
31.	Vol. 4 No. 120 Fifth chords (Allegro)	(0:54)
32.	Vol. 4 No. 116 Melody (Tempo di Marcia)	(1:28)
33.	Vol. 5 No. 126 Change of Time (Allegro pesante)	(0:36)
34.	Vol. 5 No. 135 Perpetuum mobile (Allegro molto)	(0:51)
35.	Vol. 3 No. 87 Variations (Allegro moderato)	(1:13)
36.	Vol. 5 No. 138 Bagpipe (Allegretto)	(1:11)
37.	Vol. 3 No. 73 Sixths and triads (Comodo)	(0:31)
38.	Vol. 5 No. 128 Peasant Dance (Moderato)	(1:08)

39.	Vol. 5 No. 122 Chords together and opposed (Molto vivace)	(0:48)
40.	Vol. 5 No. 130 Village joke (Moderato)	(0:42)
41.	Vol. 5 No. 129 Alternating thirds (Allegro molto)	(0:45)
42.	Vol. 2 No. 50 Minuetto (Tempo di Minuetto)	(0:28)
43.	Vol. 2 No. 40 In Yugoslavian mode (Allegretto)	(0:32)
44.	Vol. 5 No. 131 Fourths (Allegro non troppo)	(0:49)
45.	Vol. 5 No. 133 Syncopation (Allegro)	(0:59)
46.	Vol. 6 No. 140 Free variations (Allegro molto)	(1:32)
47.	Vol. 6 No. 144 Minor seconds, major sevenths (Molto adagio mesto)	(4:04)
48.	Vol. 6 No. 146 Ostinato (Vivacissimo)	(2:02)
49.	Vol. 6 No. 147 March (Allegro)	(1:50)

Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm

50.	Vol. 6 No. 148	(1:44)
51.	Vol. 6 No. 149	(0:55)
52.	Vol. 6 No. 150	(1:10)
53.	Vol. 6 No. 151	(1:27)
54.	Vol. 6 No. 152	(1:07)
55.	Vol. 6 No. 153	(1:47)

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Playing Time : 63'59"

BARTÓK

Balázs Szokolay, Piano

	1		Allegro barbaro	(2:25)
2	-	4	Three Hungarian Folksongs from the Csik District	(3:09)
5	-	19	Fifteen Hungarian Peasant Songs	(11:59)
20	-	22	Sonatina	(3:46)
23	-	25	Three Rondos on Slovak Folktunes	(7:33)
26	-	49	Mikrokosmos (Selection)	(26:13)
50	-	55	Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm	(8:20)

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